

Building a Global Community of Wounded Healers

Andrews University's International Center for Trauma Education & Care hosts virtual Trauma Awareness and Intervention training

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Faculty, student and alumni presenters participated in the virtual training provided by the International Center for Trauma Education & Care from July 21–25.

By: Hannah Gallant, University Communication contract writer

From July 21–25, 90 registered participants attended a virtual Trauma Awareness and Intervention training provided by the International Center for Trauma Education & Care over Zoom. Training participants represented a total of eight different countries in addition to the U.S. There were individuals attending from the Bangkok Adventist International School and the Ekamai International School in Thailand and the Cambodia Vietnamese Adventist School in Cambodia. Participants also attended virtually from Myanmar, Laos, Canada, Argentina, the Philippines and Australia.

This training was led by three collaborators: Ingrid Slikkers, assistant professor of social work and director, International Center for Trauma Education & Care, Andrews University; Bill Wells, refugee ministry coordinator, ASAP Ministries (Advocates for Southeast Asians and the Persecuted); and Charity Garcia, assistant professor of curriculum & instruction, Department of Teaching, Learning & Curriculum, Andrews University.

“The intended purpose and goal was to give teachers, education leaders and ministry leaders who work with refugees and displaced persons the skills to help communities they serve to address the issues of trauma and heal from them,” says Wells.

According to the training flyer, the objective was to help participants learn how traumatic experiences affect the whole person. Participants explored a variety of topics including how to identify the effects of trauma, ways to better understand those affected by trauma, practical skills for teachers and community leaders, and strategies to promote healing in themselves and others.

On the last two days the participants divided into two groups: educators and community leaders. Topics in these workshops included how to have a trauma-informed ministry and trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive classrooms.

Slikkers led the workshop for pastors and community leaders titled “Trauma Informed Care” while Garcia served as the lead presenter for the educator workshops titled “Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Building Community & Resilience.”

“Working together across departments with all of our unique strengths joining together to make a positive impact on teachers and community leaders from multiple countries was an absolute privilege,” says Garcia. “The teachers that participated particularly enjoyed the faith-integrated and hope-filled perspective of trauma, as well as learning practical strategies to regularly engage in self-care and to meet the needs of their students.”

Throughout the training, Slikkers, Garcia and Wells were assisted by Jasmin Wilson and Mary Gayen, recent Andrews alums, and current undergraduate and graduate students from the School of Social Work and the Department of Teaching, Learning & Curriculum: Erick Pena, Sarah Riedel, David Springer, Jennifer Pena and Stephanie Wilczynski.

“In this time of COVID-19, so many people have emotional and mental burdens that they carry. Yet still, many of them work in professions in which they have to take care of others. The training empowered them to help take care of themselves, their charges and even shared a ray of hope with them. This to me was an extremely impactful and rewarding experience,” says Springer.

This training session was the fourth partnership between ASAP, the Andrews University School of Social Work and the newly created International Center for Trauma Education & Care. They have been doing training and education segments together since 2018 and were originally planning for this training to be a mission trip to allow for in-person training.

“We plan to continue to do trainings in the future and are now thinking through how to provide them via Zoom since we have requests already lined up for the next couple of years to go in-person,” explains Slikkers. “This has opened possibilities that we had not previously imagined where not only more students can be involved, but more people can be reached.”

Participants who completed 10 hours of training by attending each of the five days received a certificate of completion in the first step of certification that will be possible through this new Center.

Though the training was not in-person as expected, the leaders and participants felt that it made an impact. “The depth of vulnerability that they were willing to express, even though we were only meeting by Zoom, was really a surprise to me,” says Wells. “What that depth of vulnerability showed was that these were teachers and ministry leaders who recognized that this was a safe place to talk about real things in their own lives and situations in their churches and schools that we could discuss openly with them and give them encouragement, insight or help.”

“God blessed in a way beyond anything I could have imagined! Initially I was frustrated that because of COVID we had to do this work via Zoom rather than in person. However, the connections that were created were clearly orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. We had participants state that after this training they would like to have trauma-informed schools, churches, church boards and leadership,” adds Slikkers.

In order to facilitate more participation and model the importance of community in the Zoom training, presenters limited their PowerPoint use and encouraged participants to turn on their videos so they could see each speaker and make as much eye contact as possible.

“We prayed that we would find community among our participants, despite being on the Zoom platform, and that the sincerity of our message and the beauty of Christ’s healing would shine through,” says Wilson. “Watching God work through our imperfections, our limitations, the technology mishaps and a decent language barrier was absolute life-changing and continues to be a driving force through which we serve.”

Prior to the training, participants filled out a survey regarding what they knew and understood about trauma. After the event they filled out another survey which evaluated what was done well and what they found the most helpful. The goal was to provide the team of presenters with knowledge of how to facilitate this kind of training in the future.

“Despite being a remote platform, the presentations were very interactive and fostered a sense of community amongst the participants that was as rich as those that I’ve experienced in on-site courses—in many ways richer,” describes Lorraine Hexstall, a training attendee. “The fact is, we were doing more than gaining tools to use in our individual spheres. We perceived that through your training God is building a global community of wounded healers uniquely equipped to meet today’s social and spiritual needs. We entered as students and left revelling anew about being granted the grace and privilege of being part of the family of God. What a mighty God we serve!”